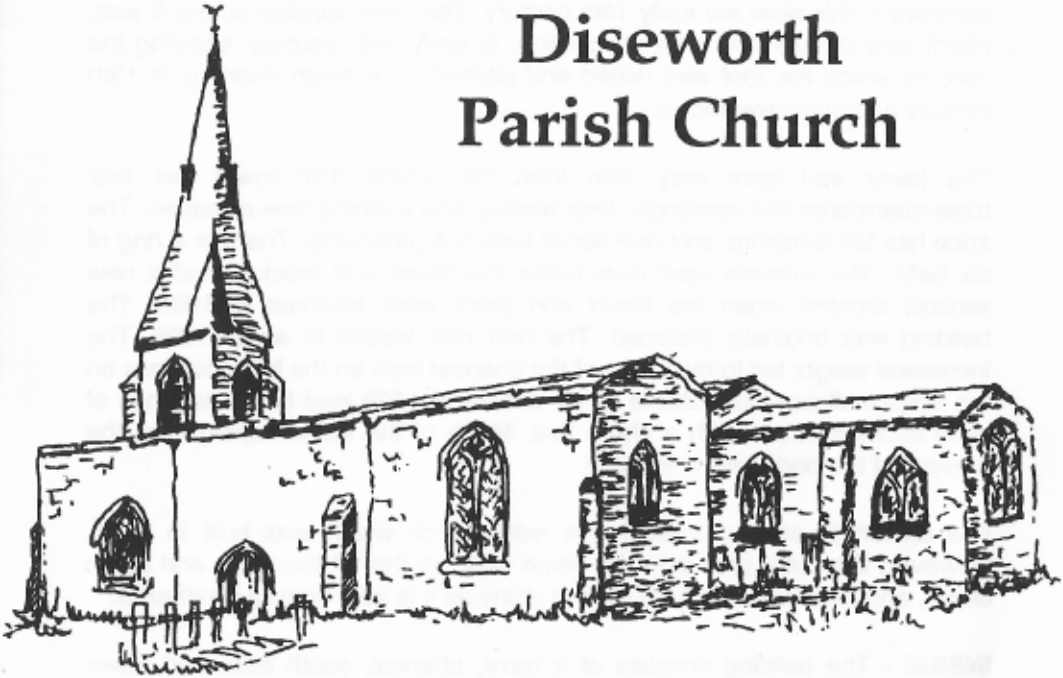
Diseworth Parish Church



Diseworth Parish Church, which is dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels, stands at 'The Cross', where the four 'Gates' of Diseworth, Hall Gate, Lady Gate, Grimes Gate and Clements Gate, meet. The Village War Memorial is set into the church-yard wall beside the church gates.

The church is built of local stone, predominantly in the transitional or Early English style, with a broach spire. The oldest parts of the fabric, the remains of a Saxon single-cell church, can be seen in the north wall. There are traces of herringbone walling (A) at foundation level on the nave wall and Saxon long-and-short work, quoins, on the NE angle of the nave. (B) The two blocked windows in the chancel (C) are of Saxo-Norman type. Herringbone work can also be seen inside the building at the base of the old external nave wall in the south aisle chapel.

Near the corner of the chancel and the south aisle is a blocked 'lowside' or 'leper' window. (D) Through it, lepers, or the sick in times of plague, could see the altar and take part in the service without entering the church. The south aisle is primarily 13th century work. Its stonework is not tied in to the

main building but is simply butted up against the existing walls, with butresses for stability. The original pent roof line can be seen in the east and west walls. On the parapet of the south wall and near the top of the west wall (E) are four heads, much defaced by weathering. The E and SW windows in this aisle are early 13th century. The taller window on the S wall, which cuts through the original roof line, is early 14th century, showing the date by which the roof was raised and pitched. The south doorway is 13th century and much weathered.

The tower and spire may date from the 1300s. The tower has four triple-chamfered bell openings, their tracery and cusping now removed. The spire has tall broaches and one tier of lucarnes (dormers). There is a ring of six bells. The external west door under the tower was blocked and a new window created when the tower and spire were restored in 1896. The building was originally thatched. The roof was leaded in about 1699. The increased weight led to distortion of the chancel arch so the brick buttress on the north wall was built. Some of the sheets of 1699 lead have markings of shoe outlines, made with a sharp tool. Much of the stone coping from the parapet of the north wall is missing.

The church is entered through the north porch which was built in 1661. However, the outer arch is in the same style as that of the north and south doors, and may be made from reused stone as it is very heavily weathered.

INSIDE - The building consists of a nave, chancel, south aisle and tower room. Moving clockwise round the church one may note the following:

Above the north door is a panel (1) carrying the royal arms: those of George II. East of the door are a memorial to Trooper George Harris, killed in the Transvaal in 1901, and a carved marble tablet commemorating Anne Cheslyn, drowned in a pool at Langley Priory in 1823. In the NE corner of the nave, over the present clergy stall,is a tablet (2) inscribed with the genealogy of the Cheslyn family of Langley Priory. Some 20 of those named are buried in a vault below the pews. This was reroofed in 1969 when repairs were being made to the floor of the nave.

The church has a long, bare chancel, with a fine 13th century chancel arch. The seating came from Langley Priory Chapel. There is a very old ambry (3) behind the altar and a piscina (4) in the south wall. The tiled floor was constructed in 1885, covering the old ledger stones. The octagonal pulpit, with its sounding board, is of oak and was donated by Robert Cheslyn in 1713.

On the north wall of the chancel (5) are memorials to John Shakespear (professor of Oriental languages and purchaser of Langley Priory from the Cheslyns in 1830) who died in 1858, Richard Cheslyn, died 1843, and his daughter Anne, died 1882. The Shakespear family were great benefactors to the church. The stained glass windows in the chancel were given in memory of various members of the family between 1886 and 1899. They also gave the altar and its oak panelled reredos.

The south arcade is early 13th century, the arches matching the chancel arch and the tower arch in style. The piers are hexagonal with dogtooth ornament on the capitals. There are two very old carved heads, one of an animal, in the spandrels of the arches (6) facing the nave. The south aisle was built in two phases, the original roof lines being clearly visible. The stone font, which is now considered to be entirely Saxon, stands by the south door. It has a modern wooden font cover.

The Lady Chapel was installed in the south aisle in 1940 to commemorate the Rev.J.A.Palmer. The silver lamp, given in memory of Father Hacker, which now hangs over the high altar, used to hang here. It was lost for some years until found in the Vicarage attic. Brass trefoil leaves from the old candle holders were incorporated into the new chandeliers when electricity was installed. On the south wall of the aisle is a stone plaque (7) recording its restoration in the early 1900s in memory of the Rev. Herbert Lock. A wooden tablet over the south door (8) records the repewing of the church in 1841. The church still contains many box pews, but they are all modern replacements.

The western end of the south aisle is now used as the vestry. On the walls (9) are two large marble memorial tablets to members of the Lowdham family and one to Isaac Hoyland. There is a list of the past Vicars of Diseworth (10) near the vestry door. Against the wall behind the font are pieces of old plaster, with graffiti of Civil War date, found in a house in the village.

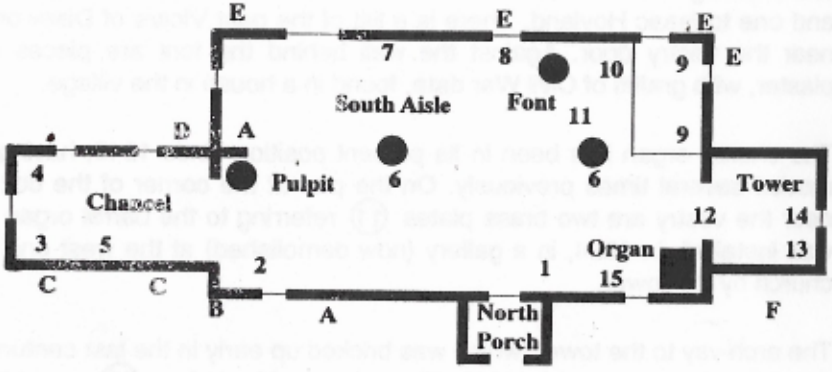
The church organ has been in its present position since 1940, having been moved several times previously. On the pier at the corner of the box pews near the vestry are two brass plates (11) referring to the barrel organ which was installed, in 1824, in a gallery (now demolished) at the west end of the church by the tower.

The archway to the tower, which was bricked up early in the last century, was reopened and restored in 1896. There is an old window (12) now blocked, above the arch. Inside the ringing chamber under the tower are several items of interest - a large wooden panel (13) inscribed with extracts from the will of

Caleb Lowdham, died 1825; brass plaques (14) recording the renovation of the tower in 1896, the gift of the churchyard gates and chancel windows by the Shakespears, and the installation of the clock in 1937; and, two stone tablets explaining the source of a donation, which, in 1902 provided the church with the stained glass windows in the tower room and the vestry, the three front pews in the Lady Chapel and its fifth bell, dedicated to S. Joseph of Arimathea.

In an inventory of 1552, the church is recorded as having three bells, one broken. The earliest surviving bell was first cast in 1619, the second in 1626, the third in 1672, the fourth in 1803, and the fifth was acquired in 1902. These five were recast by Taylor's of Loughborough and hung together with the sixth, donated by the Rev. J.A.Palmer, in 1921.The present clock has a movement built by Smiths of Derby and commemorates the coronation of George VI in 1937. The slate dial (F) is much earlier, and carries the initials of the churchwardens of 1730. The original clock, Cromwellian, in date, is now in the Leicester New Walk Museum. All but the current parish registers have been deposited in the County Archives.

During this century, much of the church woodwork has been repaired or created by the local family of craftsmen, the Fletchers. Near the north door, a tablet (15) made from the old roof timbers records the restoration of the nave roof in 1949. The chancel roof was restored in 1964.



More detailed information can be obtained from the booklet 'The Churches of Diseworth', compiled by I.Houghton for the Diseworth Local History Society, copies of which are on sale in the church and in the village shop.